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RAKISH NAILS AND TREEHOUSE ARCHITECTURE

By Keith Long

I craned my neck and gazed up at the treehouse.

"Gee, I don't know," I told my cousin Stanley, who had built the aerie all by himself. "It doesn't look too sturdy."

"Of course it's sturdy," Stanley said. "It's walnut."

"Well, okay, sure," I said. "But I didn't mean the tree. I meant the house."

"What's not to be sturdy?" Stanley asked. "It's still up there, ain't it?"

"More or less," I answered.

Stanley began to climb the rope that hung alongside the million-year-old trunk of the walnut tree.

"Come on up," he hollered over his shoulder.

"I'm not getting into that rickety thing," I said.

"Weenie," Stanley answered in his most mocking 12-year-old voice.

"I'm not a weenie," I said, less forcefully, since I was two years his junior. "It's just that my major inhibitions stem from my awareness that your questionable edifice doesn't conform to the pattern of other arboreal architecture I have observed." When in doubt, I tried to make up in big words what I lacked in age.

"Say what?"

"Your treehouse ain't as straight as other treehouses. It lacks for, umm, corners."

"Where have you ever seen another treehouse?" Stanley asked, peering over his plywooded wall at me.

"In the funny papers."

"Give me a break," Stanley said. "Those trees are drawn in. For Pete's sake, I could build a square treehouse if I got to draw the tree. I had to take what I could get."

"Yeah, but just look at it," I said.

"Hey, life doesn't imitate art, okay?" Stanley said, throwing his sixth-grade knowledge of philosophy of art all over me. "C'mon up."

"Nope."

"You can see McFinney's swimming pool from here."

"Hurry up and toss the rope down," I said. After all, McFinney's 11-year-old daughter had the greatest set of legs in town. She could kick a football forty yards.

My worst fears were realized once I reached the floor of Stanley's lookout. He had pretty much thrown the whole Doric, Ionian, and Corinthian ideals out the window, so to speak, and left the notion of balance and support to nature. The interior did not bespeak of Early American or even Primitive. It was more like "Splintered Primeval."

I grabbed a two-by-four to pull myself up into the structure, but the whole contraption swayed sickeningly.

"Don't worry," Stanley said. "It's solid. I used 16-penny nails."

"How many?!" I asked, too shaky to move.

"About 4,000."

"No wonder," I said. "The house is full of nails. It's too nail-heavy for the tree to support it."

"Nonsense. This thing will be here long after you're dead and gone."

"It depends on which'll hit the ground first — it or me," I pointed out.

"It won't hit the ground," he said. "It'll hit you. C'mon. I've got binoculars stashed up here."

I stepped hastily up into the drafty confines of the house, almost plunging to my death through a gaping



ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY MUENCH

hole in the middle of the floor.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing at the hole.

"I'm going to put a trap door there," Stanley said.

"What for?" I asked.

"Girls."

I looked warily through the hole at the mass of briers waiting 40 feet below, and imagined what a mess the ambulance crew would have to deal with.

"Even for Minnie McFinney?" I asked.

"Of course not," Stanley said. "She ain't a girl. She's a kicker."

I edged my way around one side of the treehouse, noticing that from the inside the roof hinted of a cathedral effect, producing an attitude reminiscent of the Tudor style.

"Pretty tall house," I said.

"Makes it seem more spacious. I'm going to add a mirror to further the effect," Stanley replied, stepping to one side so I could squeeze around to the north face.

At the corner, or at least that section of the treehouse that most resembled a corner, I narrowly escaped a severe raking by a protruding, 16-penny nail.

"What're all these rakish, protruding nails for?" I asked, indignantly.

"Hanging stuff," Stanley said.

"What kind of stuff?"

"I hang lots of stuff on them. Binoculars, canteens, hats, and. . ."

"And skin?"

"Well, you've got to watch where you edge," Stanley confessed.

Judging Stanley's admission a moral victory on my part, I grabbed the binoculars and in an instant the McFinney estate, with all its wonderful splendor, came into full view.

"Where's Minnie?" I asked.

"Beats me. Probably in town, practicing her coffin-corner punts."

"Where's the swimming pool?"

"Leaned against the outhouse. That blue thing."

"Bummer," I said. "You got me up here under false pretenses. There's not even any water in it."

"Hey, it's February. What'd you expect?"